

Comments on the proposed conservation of *Hydromantes* Gistel, 1848 (Amphibia, Caudata) by the designation of *Salamandra genei* Temminck & Schlegel, 1838 as the type species

(Case 2868; see BZN 50: 219–223; 51: 149–153; 52: 183–186, 339–342)

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The comments made by Dr Sebastiano Salvidio (published in BZN 52: 339–340) and from Prof Alain Dubois (BZN 52: 340–342) persuade us to endorse the proposals put forward by the latter to replace those made originally by two of us (Smith & Wake) in BZN 50: 221.

Dubois's proposals are to designate the American species *Spelerpes platycephalus* Camp, 1916 as the type species of *Hydromantes* Gistel, 1848, rather than the European species *Salamandra genei* Temminck & Schlegel, 1838, and to place the names *Geotriton* Bonaparte, [1832] and *Hydromantoides* Lanza & Vanni, 1981 (which would become a junior objective synonym of *Hydromantes*) on the Official Index. The overwhelming desires of both European and American workers for stability would, under these proposals, be met by all who ever deal with *Hydromantes* (auct., sensu lato) in both the areas that it occupies.

Comment on the proposed conservation of *HEMIDACTYLINI* Hallowell, 1856 (Amphibia, Caudata)

(Case 2869; see BZN 50: 129–132; 51: 153–156, 264–265, 341–342; 52: 337–338)

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The main points raised by Dubois (BZN 52: 337–338) are that our application ill-advisedly seeks (1) to conserve a 'rather obscure' name (*HEMIDACTYLINI* Hallowell,

1856) used 'less than 20 times' over a span of 'less than 30 years'; (2) in so doing, to suppress a family-group name (MYCETOGLOSSINA) that might be revived if its type genus (*Mycetoglossus* Bonaparte, [1839], the name of which is a junior objective synonym of *Pseudotriton* Tschudi, 1838) is ever regarded as belonging to a family group different from that to which *Hemidactylum* Tschudi, 1838 belongs; (3) to make a test case 'to completely abandon the principle of priority and to free systematics from the tyranny of the past', and to press selectively, not consistently, for abandonment of priority as a deciding factor in choosing between synonyms. We comment in the following paragraphs upon each of these three points.

(1) We maintain that it is preferable to continue use of the name HEMIDACTYLIINI on the basis of its usage despite the priority of MYCETOGLOSSINA, which was a 'forgotten' name for 134 years until revived by Dubois (1984). Application of the principle of priority is rightly not limitless, as is attested by the provisions of Article 79 of the Code.

(2) It is true that a family-group taxon to which *Pseudotriton*, the valid senior synonym of *Mycetoglossus*, belongs may ultimately be regarded as different from the comparable taxon containing *Hemidactylum*, although at present no such distinction is justified. However, there would be no loss in suppressing MYCETOGLOSSINA, based as it is on an objectively invalid generic name and never having been used except as revived in 1984 to replace HEMIDACTYLIINI. The name MYCETOGLOSSINA is a nomen oblitum (in the sense of a long-forgotten, unused name) that under the 1961 and 1964 Codes would automatically have been rejected; under the current Code it requires action by the Commission for suppression, as we have requested.

(3) We categorically support the principle of priority, without which biological nomenclature would be chaotic. In referring to 'mindless adherence to priority' we simply mean its application without regard to what we call 'the principle of stability'. Evaluation of stability is subjective, to be sure, whereas priority is objective, but stability merits far more consideration than it gets from some systematists. It is the prime purpose of the Code (see the Preamble, p. 3). The long history of the rule of priority over all else is not easily altered to a balanced consideration of the overall impact of any given name change. At one time the literature was limited to rather a few specialists, whereas these days the general public and leaders in all fields are being broadly educated in the diversity, exploitation, conservation and management of an increasing number of life forms. Use of scientific names in a vast variety of contexts has increased enormously in the last few decades, and will continue to do so. For that reason it has become increasingly important to maintain stability of scientific names, for they are vital to communication far afield from working systematists. Specialists are, however, the guardians of biological nomenclature, and it is their responsibility to see that it remains as stable as possible, consistent with taxonomic knowledge. As stated by Bock (BZN 52: 287): 'Nothing is gained and much is lost every time an established name is replaced by an unused senior synonym regardless of why the senior synonym had become unused'.

In conclusion, we reiterate that in our view the proposals of our application are of sound merit.